

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Hearing on “Combating the Opioid Crisis: Battles in the States”  
July 12, 2017**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

Addiction is an equal opportunity destroyer. It is a crisis that does not pick people based on their age, race, or socioeconomic status. And it most certainly does not pick based on political parties.

From my roundtables throughout the Second District of Oregon, it didn't matter if I was in a rural community or a more populated city; the tragic stories were similar. We all know someone who has been impacted by this epidemic. In Oregon, more people now die from drug-related overdoses than from automobile accidents – and sadly, that is not unique to my home state.

According to a preliminary data analysis, drug overdose deaths in 2016 most likely exceeded 59,000 – the largest annual jump ever recorded in the United States. What's worse? Some of the preliminary numbers from the states indicate that their numbers within the first six months of this year are already surpassing last year's total numbers. And over the past seven years, opioid addiction diagnoses are up nearly 500 percent, according to a recent report.

Despite a report released by the Centers for Disease Control last week which indicates that the number of opioid prescriptions has decreased over the past five years, the rates are still three times as high as they were in 1999, and the amount of opioids prescribed in 2015 was enough for every American to be medicated around the clock for three weeks.

That report also found that counties in Oregon have some of the highest levels of opioid prescriptions in the country. Of the top 10 counties in Oregon for opioid prescriptions, five of them are in my rural district. Moreover, Oregonians age 65 and older are being hospitalized for opioid abuse, overdoses, and other complications at a far higher rate than any other state in our union.

Sadly, overdose deaths continue to escalate. This epidemic is getting more severe. Challenges clearly remain.

First, we need to improve data collection, and a few states are already requiring more specific information related to overdose deaths. Quite simply, we can't solve what we don't know.

We need to be able to have more timely and reliable data so we can better understand and address the full scope of the problem. There also needs to be an increase in overdose prevention efforts, improvement with respect to the utilization and interoperability of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, and we need to increase access to evidence-based treatment, including Medication-Assisted Treatment.

Combatting this epidemic requires an all-hands-on-deck effort from federal, state, and local officials – spanning from health care experts to our law enforcement community. That is precisely why we are having this hearing today.

Last year Congress took action to combat this crisis by passing legislation, including the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act, and states have pursued programs to strengthen our fight against this epidemic. But much more needs to be done. We need to work together to ensure that the tools and funding Congress has created are reaching our state and localities, and that they are being used effectively. We hope to hear from the state officials before us today to see how they are utilizing these funds and what programs have proven to be successful.

We greatly appreciate the witnesses who have agreed to appear before us today. We hope to have a constructive dialogue about what the states are doing; how we can improve data collection; what initiatives are working, what isn't working; and how the federal government can be a partner in this collective fight. I look forward to your testimony, and working with all of you to help our communities and solve this horrific crisis.